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ABSTRACT

"Structional" analysis identifies, simultaneously yet separately, both the structural and functional links that tie sentence pairs together. Coherence in prose results from an appropriate combination of structural and functional relations between each sentence pair. Structural links between sentences comprise syntactic and lexical links; functional links reflect the logical relations that comments have toward structurally-linked head sentences. These relations can be either explicit or implicit. Benefits derived from using structional analysis in the classroom include: closer examination of paragraphs to notice specific words and structures; identification of devices an established author uses to develop ideas; and identification of errors made by student writers that keep their writing from being coherent and clear. (Examples of structional analysis and suggested techniques for classroom use are appended.) (AEA)

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STRUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF PROSE

We have many systems to explore the grammar of a single sentence. We also have many terms with which to discuss a long sequence of sentences: terms for the various genres of total works of prose, like essay, short story, novel, and so forth; or for the various rhetorical parts of a piece of writing (introduction, exposition, refutation, conclusion, and others); or for the various modes of prose (description, narration, exposition, persuasion); or for the various methods of development (definition, classification, comparison, example, etc.).

Usually when we examine a model piece of prose in a composition class, we ignore the grammar and focus on some of these larger aspects of the piece, on the theory that the single sentence is less interesting and less important than the full meaning of a piece worked out by the development of its parts, and the implications of that meaning in the realm of ideas. I see little to argue with here, for understanding the total meaning of a written work and the methods the author follows to achieve that meaning are clearly the ultimate goals of prose analysis. But I would like to argue today that in order to understand the more global and important construction of meaning, we need to start at a lower level--not with the single sentence, but with linked pairs of sentences.

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I believe that coherent discourse consists of linked pairs of linked sentences. Each sentence in discourse is specifically linked to at least one other sentence, more often to two sentences (an earlier sentence and a subsequent one), and occasionally to three or four other sentences. These linked pairs form a chain that holds the discourse together. Furthermore, I believe that each link is really double, that it represents both a structural link and a functional link. And here is the nub of my argument: each sentence that shows a specific structural link with an earlier sentence also shows a specific functional link with that same sentence. (Note that I refer here to links between pairs of typographical sentences, whatever may be the internal patterns of those two sentences.)

A prose analysis that identifies only the structural links between sentences is incomplete. So too is an analysis that identifies only the functional links. To be adequate, I feel that an analysis must account simultaneously for both sets of relations. That is, the analysis should identify both the structural and the functional connections between pairs of sentences in context. When this is done, what emerges is a clear skeleton of the prose anatomy. The analysis offers a firm basis for discussing the larger ramifications of the piece of discourse.

It's time now to explain in more detail what I mean by structural and functional links. Coherence in discourse is

partly a result of sentence structure, including both the syntax and the lexicon of the sentence. Certain syntactic constructions and certain words or phrases link a given sentence to one preceding it. Also, coherence is partly a result of sentence function. A sentence should have a definite logical relationship with the same sentence to which it is linked structurally. It should serve a definite function--to define or refute or give an example of the earlier sentence, perhaps, or simply give additional information.

Let me begin with an examination of structural links, because they are somewhat easier to identify and because they must be labeled before you can think about functional links.

Structure, as I said, involves both syntax and lexicon. Two sentences might be linked <u>syntactically</u> through a personal pronoun whose antecedent is in an earlier sentence; or through a demonstrative related to a noun or an idea in an earlier sentence; or through an opening coordinating conjunction, a transitional adverb, or a phrase like <u>in other words</u>; or through an ellipsed fragment whose meaning can be filled out only through reference to an earlier sentence; or through a construction that parallels an earlier sentence. These are the most common syntactic links, though the list is not complete. Also, two sentences might be linked <u>lexically</u> through a repeated key term (say, the word <u>marriage</u> in both sentences); or through a synonym (<u>marriage</u> in one, <u>matrimony</u> in the other); or through an antonym (<u>marriage</u> and <u>divorce</u>);

or through cognate words (marriage in one sentence, married in the second); or through common membership in a lexical set (marriage, wedding, bride, groom, ceremony) that runs through a sequence of sentences.

I call all syntactic relations explicit structural links, for they are clearly present and point-at-able. I also consider repeated key terms to be explicit structural links, for the same reasons. All other lexical links I consider to be implicit structural links, for possibly opinions may vary on whether a given word is really significantly related to another word or not.

Every sentence after the first sentence of a discourse will have at least one and often two or more structural links with a preceding sentence. If no structural link exists, the sentence initiates a new section of the discourse--perhaps a new division or a new chapter. Assuming there is a structural link, the first sentence of the linked pair is called the head sentence, and the second sentence is called a comment on the head sentence. Notice that a comment on a head sentence can in turn become a head sentence for a subsequent comment, thus linking one pair of sentences to another pair and chaining the entire passage together.

Now, if the structural link hooks the comment back to an immediately preceding head sentence, the structural link is said to be adjacent. If the link leapfrogs backward over one or more intervening sentences to an earlier head sentence,

the structural link is delayed. So the location of the comment in relation to its head sentence marks it as either an adjacent comment or a delayed comment. And the presence or absence of syntactic links or repeated key words marks it as either an explicit comment or an implicit comment.

We can now begin the first stage in a strunctional analysis of a passage. Perhaps I should explain that I got so tired of using the phrase "structural and functional" that I coined the portmanteau word "strunctional." It's inelegant, but handy. Bear with it--it grows on you.

To make a strunctional analysis, you first number each sentence of a passage. You can do this in the margin--there's no need to rewrite or rearrange the material. You number continuously right across paragraph breaks. The opening sentence of a paragraph is often linked to an earlier sentence in the discourse, and the analysis will show this important linkage. If there is no link, the paragraph begins a new section of the discourse, and the analysis will also show this.

After you number the sentences, you read each consecutive pair of sentences--1 and 2, 2 and 3, 3 and 4, and so on--looking for structural links between the pairs. One such link suffices to join the sentences; you needn't try to identify every link present in the comment. If the second sentence of a pair is structurally linked with the first of the pair, it is an adjacent comment on its mate. But if there is no structural connection, say, between sentences 5 and 6, you then read each

earlier sentence as part of a pair with 6, moving backward sentence by sentence. That is, you read 4 and 6, then 3 and 6, then 2 and 6, until you find a pairing that is structurally linked. In this case, the 6th sentence would be a delayed comment, with sentence 2 perhaps its head sentence. Always look for the closest commenting relationship. If sentence 4 is linked to 3, and 3 is linked to 2, then 4 is obviously somehow connected to 2 as well--but there is usually no need to indicate this; the adjacent sequence speaks for itself.

A sentence that leads off a passage and hence has nothing earlier upon which it comments is unmarked in a strunctional analysis. Each succeeding sentence is marked a if it is an adjacent comment and d if it is a delayed comment. After the d you add the number of its head sentence. Thus, 6 d-2 means that the sixth sentence is a delayed comment on the second sentence. If the link is explicit--that is, if it is a syntactic link or a linkage through repeated key terms--, you are now through with the structural part of the analysis. If the link is implicit, you put parentheses around ~~the~~ the a or the d and its number to show that this relationship exists in your judgment, but may be interpreted differently by other readers.

In case you are wondering about topic sentences, forget them. In strunctional analysis, there is no need to identify a topic sentence--which is just as well, in the light of Richard Braddock's research on that elusive critter.

If you look on page 4 of your handout, you will see an example of strunctional analysis. The sentences of the top paragraph (by Buckminster Fuller) have been numbered. These numbers are repeated beneath it, and the first column of letters shows the structural links of the sentences in the paragraph (1 2 a 3 a 4 a 5 d-1). Sentence 1 starts off, or initiates, the paragraph and is hence unmarked. Sentence 2 is an explicit adjacent comment on sentence 1 because of the repetition of the key term automobile. Sentence 3 is an explicit adjacent comment on 2 through the repeated you. Sentence 4 is similarly an explicit adjacent comment on 3. And sentence 5 jumps back to comment explicitly on sentence 1 through two lexical links, the repeated word spaceship and the cognate pair, mechanical and machine. That finishes the structural stage of the analysis.

Next, we must determine what functional links exist between each of these structurally-linked sentence pairs. Each comment in a linked pair has a recognizable logical relation with its head sentence. I have followed Louis Milic's system of logical relationships. Milic asserts that only eight relations account for the vast majority of functional links between sentences. You will find these eight on page 2 of your handout. The initial sentence of a passage is again unmarked functionally, just as it is unmarked structurally. The other seven relations have typical function markers--AND, BUT, OR, THAT IS, FOR EXAMPLE, THEREFORE, and FOR--and symbols

used in the analysis. For teaching purposes, incidentally, I find the typical function markers are far more helpful than the Latin-sounding names of the relations.

To determine the functional link between a pair of structurally-linked sentences, look first for one of the typical markers at or near the front of the commenting sentence, or for one of their numerous synonyms--also, moreover, next, in addition in place of and; however, conversely, on the other hand in place of but, and so forth. If such a word or phrase is present, you have an explicit functional link between the two sentences. You merely put the appropriate symbol next to the structural marking of the sentence.

But if an explicit function marker is missing--as is the case in the majority of English sentences--the reader must infer the logical connection between the sentences. To do this, you take your structurally-linked pair of sentences and read it seven times, each time inserting a different one of the typical function markers between the sentences. One of these markers will seem to correspond most closely to the intended logical meaning of the sentences. Use its symbol for the functional part of the analysis--but once again, place parentheses around the symbol to show that it is an implicit functional link, one that reflects your own interpretation but perhaps not everyone's.

We can now return to the Fuller paragraph on page 4 of the handout and examine the functional half of the analysis--

the column of symbols (x : ! - standing for the function markers for example, therefore, for, but). Each of the comments in the paragraph has an implicit functional link with its head sentence, since Fuller apparently felt that explicit transitional words were unnecessary. I believe that my chosen functional relations do not distort Fuller's meaning--you can check this for yourself in the doctored paragraph beneath the analysis, where I've added the selected function markers. However, since this is merely my interpretation, I use parentheses to leave the relations open to argument.

A few remarks on this paragraph. I borrowed it from Richard M. Eastman's textbook, Style. He offers it as an analogy paragraph--though some people might view it as a comparison paragraph, or an example, or an illustration. These "development" terms are inherently slippery. I believe that performing a strunctional analysis before you attempt to label the larger purpose of the paragraph gives you a greater possibility of consensus and provides hard evidence for making informed statements about the paragraph. The analysis forces a student to examine the paragraph closely, to notice specific words and structures that he can then point to as support for any conclusions he may draw.

The student also gains more insight into the workings of Fuller's mind and his writing techniques. For example, the first and last sentences really carry the burden of Fuller's argument--they are the two essential sentences of the paragraph.

The three middle sentences provide an illuminating analogy that adds concreteness and familiarity to the main argument. Yet in a sense they may be called dispensable sentences--they illustrate the argument, but they don't advance it. Notice, though, how much these dispensable sentences help the reader to understand Fuller's ideas. Point this out to your students so they will realize that added explanations are not necessarily mere padding. Also, the close reading required by a strunctional analysis reveals how Fuller pulls an idea from each of the dispensable sentences into his final essential sentence: the phrase "persistently successful" in sentence 5 echoes the idea of sentence 4; the word "comprehended" echoes sentence 3; and "serviced in total" echoes sentence 2. In this paragraph, Fuller has tied all the thoughts together, like a geodesic dome.

The handout gives a bit more information on multiple relations between sentences and on parallel sentence pairs. I hope that the material is self-explanatory. I'd like to close now with a few brief comments on the usefulness of strunctional analysis in the composition class.

First, let me repeat a point I made earlier. Strunctional analysis is in no sense a substitute for a critical inquiry into the ideas and organization of a piece of prose. Rather, I view it as preliminary to such a discussion. It provides an excellent basis from which to examine these broader concepts, while supplying its own instructional benefits.

The act of performing the analysis enables a student to notice those devices which an established author uses to develop his ideas, while keeping his sentences intermeshed and his prose coherent. And after a student has played around a bit with the analysis of published prose, he can then quickly run his own writing through a strunctional analysis. He can see for himself where his theme can benefit from more explicit structural links or clearer functional links or added examples or restatements--in short, he can identify and cure many sins of commission and omission that keep his paper from being a coherent and clear development of his ideas.

Strunctional analysis is simple to do. It gives fairly replicable results. And it opens the reader's eyes to a hundred interesting things about the way good writing is built. It's worth a try.

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HANDOUT

STRUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF PROSE

Discourse consists of chains of sentence pairs linked both structurally and functionally. Every sentence linked structurally to an earlier sentence will have a specific functional link to that same sentence. Coherence in prose results from an appropriate combination of structural and functional relations between each sentence pair.

Structural Links

Structural links between sentences comprise syntactic links and lexical links.

Syntactic links include the following devices:
pronouns identified in an earlier sentence
demonstratives related to an earlier sentence
coordinating conjunctions at sentence openings
transitional adverbs or phrases at or near sentence openings
parallel structure echoing an earlier sentence
ellipsed fragment with full meaning dependent on earlier sentence

Lexical links include the following devices:
key terms repeated in both sentences
synonyms appearing in both sentences
antonyms appearing in both sentences
cognate words appearing in both sentences
lexical sets appearing in both sentences

All syntactic links and a link through repetition of a key term are considered explicit structural links. All other lexical links are considered implicit structural links.

After the first sentence of a passage, every sentence has at least one specific structural link with some one earlier sentence. When two sentences are structurally linked, the earlier one is the head sentence and the later is a comment on the head sentence. A comment in one linked pair often becomes the head sentence in a subsequent linked pair. If a comment is linked structurally to an immediately preceding head sentence, it is an adjacent comment (marked a in an analysis). If a comment is linked to an earlier sentence, with one or more intervening sentences between the comment and its head sentence, it is a delayed comment (marked d, followed by the number of the head sentence).

Functional Links

A functional link reflects the logical relation that a comment has toward its structurally-linked head sentence. A comment may, for example, contradict its head sentence or illustrate it or define a term in it.

Only eight logical relations account for the functional links between the vast majority of sentences. These eight, shown below, are drawn from the system given by Louis T. Milic in Stylists on Style (Scribners, 1969). The following list identifies the eight relations, together with archetypal function markers and the symbols that are used to represent them in a strunctional analysis.

		Initial--the first sentence of a discourse, with no previous relations.
+	AND	Additive--a sentence that continues the previous idea with new information.
-	BUT	Adversative--a sentence that changes or reverses the idea of an earlier sentence.
o	OR	Alternative--a sentence that can be substituted for an earlier sentence.
=	THAT IS	Explanatory--a restatement or definition of an earlier sentence.
x	FOR EXAMPLE	Illustrative--an example, instance, or illustration of an earlier sentence.
:	THEREFORE	Illative--a conclusion drawn from an earlier sentence, or a summary.
!	FOR	Causal--a cause or reason for an earlier sentence.

An explicit functional link is signalled by the presence in the comment of one of the above function markers or a synonym for them (next, also, however, conversely, as a case in point, consequently, etc.), at or near the opening of the comment.

An implicit functional link has no function marker in the comment; the reader must infer an appropriate logical relationship between the two sentences.

The majority of sentences in English discourse have explicit structural links and implicit functional links.

Strunctional Analysis

A strunctional analysis permits you to identify, simultaneously yet separately, both the structural and the functional links that tie sentence pairs together.

The notations for structural links are a (adjacent comment), d (delayed comment), and p (parallel comment; see p. 5); for functional links, the seven symbols shown on p. 2; and for implicit links, a set of parentheses around the appropriate notation.

To make a strunctional analysis of a passage, number each sentence of the passage consecutively, ignoring any paragraph breaks. The first sentence is considered to be the initiating sentence and is unmarked, structurally and functionally. (So, too, any later unlinked sentence that initiates a new section of the discourse is unmarked.) Opposite each successive sentence number, mark either a or d for an adjacent or delayed structural link. Substitute p for the a or d of any obviously parallel comment. Next, mark the appropriate symbol for the functional link. Finally, place parentheses around the notations of implicit links, whether structural or functional.

To identify the structurally linked pairs, read each consecutive pair of sentences together, looking for syntactic and lexical connections. If the consecutive sentences are structurally linked, the relation is adjacent. If they happen not to be linked, search back in the passage until you find an earlier sentence linked structurally to the sentence in question; the relation is then delayed. Place an a next to the number of an adjacent comment; place a d plus the number of its head sentence next to the number of a delayed comment. Change the notation of a strikingly parallel comment from a or d to p. Then place parentheses around the a, d, or p of a comment that has only an implicit structural link with its head sentence.

To identify the functional link between two structurally-paired sentences, look for one of the archetypal function markers or one of their synonyms, at or near the head of the comment. Then place the appropriate functional symbol next to the structural notation. If no explicit linking word appears in the comment, read the pair of sentences seven times, each time inserting one of the function markers before the comment. Choose the function whose marker most nearly corresponds to the sense of the two sentences and place its symbol, in parentheses, next to the structural notation.

Some Examples of Strunctional Analysis

1 One of the interesting things to me about our spaceship
is that it is a mechanical vehicle, just as is an automobile.
2 If you own an automobile, you realize that you must put
oil and gas into it, and you must put water in the radiator
3 and take care of the car as a whole. You begin to develop
4 quite a little thermodynamic sense. You know that you're
either going to have to keep the machine in good order or
5 it's going to be in trouble and fail to function. We have
not been seeing our Spaceship Earth as an integrally-
designed machine which to be persistently successful must
be comprehended and serviced in total. (R. Buckminster
Fuller, Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth, 1969)

1		
2	a	(x)
3	a	(:)
4	a	(!)
5	d-1	(-)

Although each of the functional links here is implicit, the appropriateness of the analysis can be checked by inserting typical function markers into Fuller's paragraph:

> One of the interesting things to me about our spaceship is that it is a mechanical vehicle, just as is an automobile. FOR EXAMPLE, if you own an automobile, you realize that you must put oil and gas into it, and you must put water in the radiator and take care of the car as a whole. THEREFORE, you begin to develop quite a little thermodynamic sense. FOR you know that you're either going to have to keep the machine in good order or it's going to be in trouble and fail to function. BUT we have not been seeing our Spaceship Earth as an integrally-designed machine which to be persistently successful must be comprehended and serviced in total.

The two essential sentences of this paragraph carry the burden of the argument. The other sentences are dispensable.

> One of the interesting things to me about our spaceship is that it is a mechanical vehicle, just as is an automobile. We have not been seeing our Spaceship Earth as an integrally-designed machine which to be persistently successful must be comprehended and serviced in total.

A given sentence may be linked to two or more preceding sentences. But each linked pair will have its own specific structural-functional correlation. This multiple commenting is most easily seen in passages with parallel sentences. (A p for parallel replaces a or d when an adjacent or delayed comment displays obvious parallelism.)

1 Perhaps mankind's language runs parallel with mankind
2 itself. The human being manages to live, whether his food is fish, rice, and seaweed or bread, butter, and
3 steak. He achieves transportation, whether by oxcart,
4 camelback, horse, motorcar, or airplane. He trades, whether by barter, wampum, cocoa beans, gold, banknotes,
5 or checks. He communicates with his fellow man, whether by parts of speech, roots, inflected forms, or polysynthetic sentence words. (Mario Pei, The Story of Language, 1965)

1				
2	(a)	(x)		
3	p	(o)	(d-1)	(x)
4	p	(o)	(d-1)	(x)
5	p	(+)	(d-1)	(x)

Sentence 2 functions as an illustrative comment on sentence 1 (its structural link is synonymity: mankind and human being). Sentences 3, 4, and 5 are a series of parallel adjacent comments, all modeled on sentence 2. Sentence 3, for instance, functions as an alternative for sentence 2. But it also functions as a second illustrative comment for sentence 1. The parallel structure enhances the alternative function, not the illustrative. This can be confirmed if the two key function markers or and for example are placed in turn before sentence 3. With or, it is clearly related to sentence 2; with for example, it is as clearly realted to sentence 1.

The same rationale explains the analytic markings of sentences 4 and 5. But notice the different functions within the parallel series. In relation to the first member of the parallel series, sentences 3 and 4 are alternate substitutes for sentence 2: all three sentences redundantly illustrate non-linguistic aspects of mankind, so, in a sense, any two of them are optional. Sentence 5, however, has an additive relation with its parallel predecessor; it alone illustrates mankind's linguistic nature and hence belongs in the series necessarily, not optionally.

6

Not all multiple commenting involves parallel sentences. Often several non-parallel comments perform the same function in support of the same head sentence, like a series of examples all illustrating the same concept or a series of causes for the same effect. An equifunctional comment, like a parallel comment, will have one set of structural and functional relations with its similar fellow and another set with their common head sentence. Here is an example, from Jacob Bronowski, Insight (1964):

1 Human beings can accept instructions in many different
2 forms. If we want a table made to a particular design, we
3 can show the cabinet maker another table like it. Or we
can show him a model, or a photograph, or a set of drawings,
4 or even a written description. The cabinet maker could
5 follow any of these. A machine is much more selective.
6 It is useless to show an automatic lathe a piece of metal
7 like the one that we want turned. A lathe cannot copy a
8 photograph either, or follow a blueprint. Automatic machines
are made to take instructions in one form only.

1						
2	(a)	(x)				
3	a	o	(d-1)	(x)		
4	a_3^2	(!)				
5	a	(-)				
6	(a)	(x)			d-2	(-)
7	a	o	(d-5)	(x)	d-3	(-)
8	(a)	(!)	d-5	(=)	d-1	(-)

This paragraph builds basically through a succession of adjacent comments; but within it, multiple comments are intricately interwoven, giving a complex internal structure. Note that an adjacent comment (if it appears) is always identified first in the analysis, then, to the right, the nearest delayed comment, then the farther delayed comment.

The balanced division of the paragraph into two contrasting halves is clearly indicated by the repeated functional patterns of sentences 2, 3, and 4 and of sentences 6, 7, and 8. The adversative function of sentence 5 marks the point of division. The careful equipoise within the paragraph is further emphasized by the adversative functions that relate sentence 6 to 2, sentence 7 to 3, and sentence 8 to 1. This large number of adversative relations probably typifies a comparison-contrast

passage. The last pair of contrasted sentences, 8 and 1, also serves to tie the opening and closing of the paragraph neatly together to achieve a true feeling of closure or completion.

Sentence 3 is equifunctional with sentence 2 in that both provide examples for the statement in the first sentence. To a fairly marked degree, sentence 3 is also parallel in structure with sentence 2. But because the opening clause of sentence 2 somewhat obscures the parallelism, I have chosen to treat sentence 3 merely as an adjacent comment on 2. If the parallelism strikes another analyst as significant, the marking for sentence 3 could be changed from "adjacent" to "parallel" with no major effect on the total analysis. Strong parallelism should be noted in an analysis, but there is no need to strain after parallelism that is only marginally effective in organizing a sequence of sentences.

Sentence 4 functions as a cause for two preceding sentences--a not unusual situation for causes, conclusions, summations, or negations. When these inclusive functions occur, a superscript in the notation indicates the number of the first head sentence involved in the relationship, and a subscript, the number of the last head sentence so involved.

Bronowski constructed the closing sentence, both syntactically and lexically, in a form quite similar to the opening sentence--almost to the point of parallelism. And the adversative function between sentence 8 and sentence 1 sets up the main contrast that Bronowski wants to emphasize. In fact, he could have presented the one main idea of the entire paragraph by omitting everything but these sentences:

> Human beings can accept instructions in many different forms. Automatic machines are made to take instructions in one form only.

That is, sentences 1 and 8 are the two essential sentences of the paragraph. All the other six are dispensable, so far as basic meaning is concerned. But what the dispensable sentences give us is the clarifying concreteness of the illustrations, the sight of the author's mind at work as he moves from generalization to illustrations, then pivots to new illustrations and a new generalization. Students observing Bronowski's technique can learn the difference between fullness and padding. Essential sentences present the gist of a discourse; dispensable sentences let us understand that gist. We need to be able to differentiate between the two, but they are both necessary for readable prose.

Teaching Tips

Begin a study of coherence with structural links. Don't introduce the idea of functional links until students have had enough practice to be comfortably familiar with structural links.

Use the archetypal function markers when explaining functional links to students. The Latinate terms for these functions merely muddy the waters. The symbols can be learned rather quickly, with sufficient practice.

Postpone multiple commenting until students can identify simpler basic relationships. In fact, for a stripped-down analysis, you can also ignore parallel comments and the difference between explicit and implicit relations.

Let students analyze enough published prose to recognize the various ways to make prose coherent before they try an analysis on their own writing. Otherwise, they may not notice an absence of common coherence devices.